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ABSTRACT

In 1988, a study was conducted by the J. F. Ingram State Technical College (ISTC) to determine recidivism rates for incarcerated individuals who earned a diploma and/or a General Educational Development (GED) certificate at ISTC during the years 1976 through 1986. The identification numbers of 2,844 students who had completed programs at ISTC were checked against current Alabama Department of Corrections records to identify students who had graduated and not returned to prison (non-recidivists); graduated and returned to prison on a new conviction (recidivists); and graduated but were still incarcerated. Study findings included the following: (1) of the 2,844 students included in the study, 1,182 earned diplomas, 284 earned both diplomas and GED certificates, and 1,378 earned GED certificates only; (2) 69.7% of the program completers were non-recidivists, 10.8% were recidivists, and 19.5% were still incarcerated; (3) recidivism rates were 12.9% for GED recipients, 13.3% for diploma recipients, and 16.9% for those who earned both a GED and a diploma; and (4) staff observations indicated that students who stayed in school only long enough to earn a GED were younger, initially better educated, and tended to be serving shorter sentences for less serious crimes than the students who remained in school through GED and two-year diploma training. Study findings supported the role of ISTC in reducing recividism. (AAC)

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J.F. Ingram State Technical College

November 1988

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Message from the President

J.F. Ingram State Technical College provides opportunities for incarcerated individuals to learn technical skills which will enable them to lead productive lives in a free society. Established in 1965, the early years brought a solid foundation for quality correctional education to Alabama. During the past twelve years the College has grown rapidly and is now recognized nationally for its excellence.

We, at Ingram State, are committed to creating an educational environment which will enhance student learning and foster occupational and personal development. We are committed to the exploration of effective teaching methods and provide modern teaching facilities including computer assisted instruction and tutoring labs. Evaluation of educational outcomes, including recidivism, continues to play an essential role in this process.

Ingram State is also committed to being accountable to the tax-payers who support it. Assessment, such as the current study, provides an important measure of our overall institutional effectiveness. It is our pleasure to serve Alabama through this important work.

Murry C. Gregg

Dr. Murry C. Gregg

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Recidivism Study: Positive Terminations from J.F. Ingram State Technical College 1976-1986

Helen E. Cogburn, Ed.D.

Research Highlights

Purpose of the Study. J.F. Ingram State Technical College conducted a recidivism study on its positive terminations from the years 1976 through 1986 as one measure of the efficacy of technical education of incarcerated individuals.

Methodology. Student records were examined and a list of all diploma and GED recipients for the years 1976 through 1986 was made. The cut-off date of 1986 was selected to insure a follow-up period of at least 12 months. The identification numbers of 2844 student graduates and/or GED recipients were obtained and checked against the current Alabama Department of Corrections records. The resultant data formed three categories: graduated and not returned to prison (non-recidivists), graduated and returned to prison on a new conviction (recidivists), and graduated and never released from prison (still incarcerated). The rates for each category were calculated as well as the recidivism rate based only on those graduates who were available to recidivate. This final rate was determined by dividing the number of recidivists by the difference between the total number of students and the number of still incarcerated, times one hundred.

Results. The combined rates for the years 1976 through 1986 for non-recidivists is 69.7%, for recidivists is **10.8%**, and for still incarcerated is 19.5%. The range of rates for those years was 43.4-89.9% non-recidivists, 2.1-16.1% recidivists, and 1-54.5% still incarcerated. The combined recidivism rate for only those who were available to recidivate is **13.5%** and ranged from 1.8% to 23.5% for the same period. **The success rate (percent non-recidivists) for these students is 86.5%.**

The overall recidivism rates across the years studied for each type of positive termination were 10.2% for GED recipients, 10.8% for Diploma recipients, and 13.9% for those who earned both.

The trend appears to be an overall stable or declining recidivism rate for all positively terminated students with increases in the still incarcerated rate and decline in the non-recidivist rate. This trend appears to be a result of an interaction with the still incarcerated rate which shows a sharp rise for each group after 1982.

Discussion. The low overall recidivism rate and the rates of recidivism for each type of termination combined with the high success (non-recidivism) rates support the efficacy of the education delivered to incarcerated individuals by J.F. Ingram State Technical College. Vocational education at Ingram State is a means of reducing the growth of the prison population and of creating opportunities for incarcerated individuals to become productive, tax-paying members of society.

Recidivism Study: Positive Terminations from J.F. Ingram State Technical College, 1976-1986

J.F. Ingram State Technical College (Ingram State) conducted a recidivism study on its diploma recipients for the years 1976 through 1986 as one measure of the efficacy of technical education for incarcerated individuals. It has been the policy of Ingram State to conduct annual recidivism and job placement and follow-up studies. The nature of correctional student populations has historically made traditional job placement and follow-up difficult at best, and possibly inappropriate. These students are often reluctant to maintain contact with institutions associated with their incarceration. The current recidivism study was designed to take a comprehensive look at what has emerged as the feasible and meaningful measure of program success in a correctional environment: recidivism.

Ingram State provides educational services to people incarcerated in central Alabama. It operates under the Alabama Department of Postsecondary Education and is fully accredited by the Commission on Occupational Education Institutions of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Students are referred to the college by the Social Services Division of the Alabama Department of Corrections. Curriculum in the college's 22 occupational programs is self-paced and competency-based and supported by related academic and remedial work.

The current enrollment is 784 students: 194 women and 590 men of whom 38.2% are white and 61.8% non-white. Their age range is from 17 to 52 years with 50% falling into the 21 to 27 year range. The average entry- level score on the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) is 5.0 grade level years with a range of kindergarten through twelfth. The number of grades completed ranges from third to college graduate. The average number of grades completed, as reported by the students, is nine.

These students typically have not experienced success in education or employment. Most are disadvantaged in multiple and overlapping ways. They come from disordered families who have histories of fragmented work patterns, low incomes, and low or poor educational attainment. In addition, they are personally faced with dissolution of marriages, single parenting, low levels of educational attainment, lack of adequate job skills, and chronic unemployment (Cheney-Stern,1978; Hodge,1985; Lunneburg,1983).

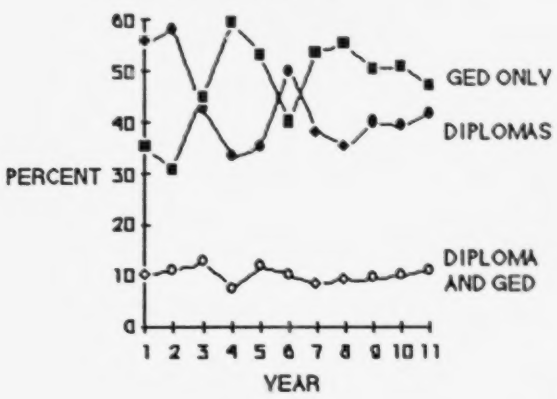
The cost of incarcerating one individual in Alabama correctional institutions is $28 a day ($10,220 per year) as reported in Corrections News (1987). The cost to tax-payers is even higher when law enforcement and court costs, and human services expenditures are included. In addition, the Alabama Department of Corrections reports "the percentage of inmates who have a previous Alabama conviction . . . at about 34%" (1988). As a result of the high cost of incarceration and a growing concern over the crime rate, ways are continually being sought to reduce recidivism (Waidley, 1986). There has been an increased emphasis, both in Alabama and nationally, on vocational education as a means to help lower recidivism rates and reintegrate individuals into society (Waidley, 1986). Vocational education is seen as a cost-effective means of reducing the growth in the prison population. Individuals who are properly trained have the opportunity to become productive, tax-paying members of society.

Methodology. Student records were examined and a list of all students with positive terminations for the years 1976 through 1986 was made. The cut-off date of 1986 was selected to insure a follow-up period of at least 12 months. The identification numbers of 2844 students who had received a diploma, a

diploma and a GED or a GED alone were obtained and checked against the current Alabama Department of Corrections records. The resultant data fell into three categories: graduated and not returned to prison (non-recidivists), graduated and returned to prison on a new conviction (recidivists), graduated and still in prison (still incarcerated). In addition, the percent recidivism was calculated for only those individuals who were available to recidivate. That is, the number of recidivists divided by the difference between the total number of students positively terminated less those still incarcerated, times one hundred.

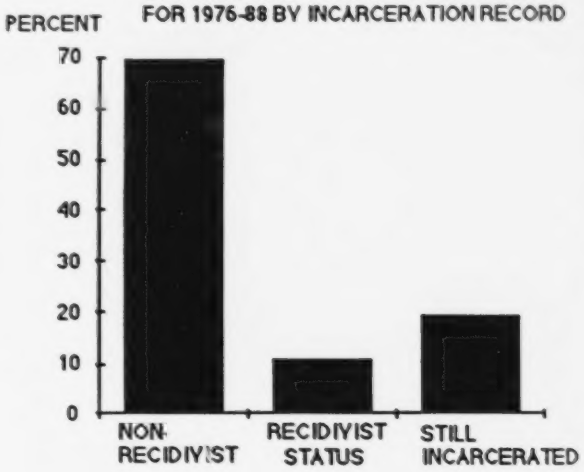
Results. Of the 2844 positive terminations that J.F. Ingram State Technical College had for the years under study, 1182 students earned diplomas, 284 earned both Diplomas and GED certificates, and 1378 earned GED certificates only. See Figure 1 for the percent of the positively terminated students who received GED's, Diplomas, and both GED's and Diplomas during 1976-1986 by years.

FIGURE 1: SUCCESSFULLY TERMINATED STUDENTS; RECIPIENTS OF GED'S, DIPLOMAS, AND BOTH GED'S AND DIPLOMAS IN 1976-1986



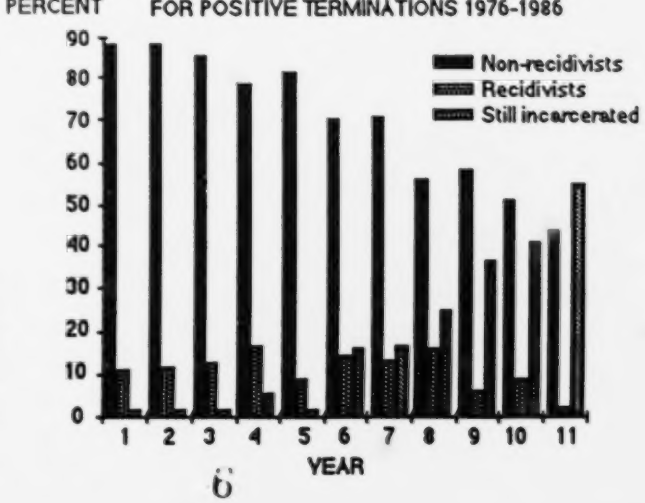
Over the years, 42-65% of positively terminated Ingram State students have earned GED Certificates. The percent have earned both GED's and Diplomas has remained relatively constant at around 10%. The percent that earned Diplomas only has ranged from 33 to 58.2 %. For the years 1976-1986, 69.7% of the students positively terminated are non-recidivists, 10.8% are recidivists, and 19.5% are still incarcerated (See Figure 2: Summary of the Status of All J.F. Ingram State Technical College Positive Terminations for the Years 1976-1986 by Incarceration Record.)

FIGURE 2: SUMMARY OF THE STATUS OF ALL INGRAM STATE POSITIVE TERMINATIONS FOR 1976-88 BY INCARCERATION RECORD



An overview of the status of the students for each of the eleven years in the study is displayed on Figure 3: Percent Non-Recidivists, Recidivists, and Still Incarcerated Positive Terminations in the Years 1976-1986.

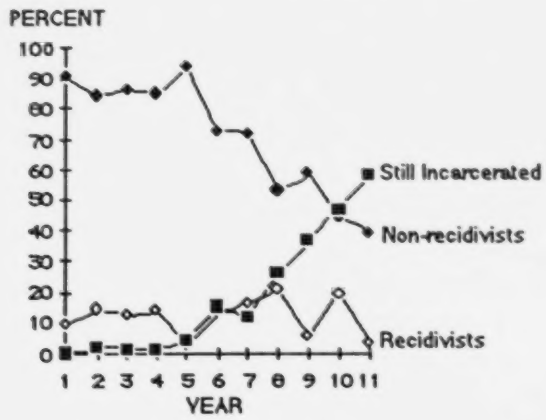
FIGURE 3: PERCENT NON-RECIDIVISTS, RECIDIVISTS, AND STILL INCARCERATED FOR POSITIVE TERMINATIONS 1976-1986



The recidivism rate remained fairly stable in the early years of the study at around 10-15%. At the mid-point in the study, the number of graduates who returned directly to prison from school sharply increased from 1.3% in 1980, to 15.8% in 1981, and to 54.5% in the final year of the study. Consequently, there was a sharp drop in both the number of non-recidivists and recidivists.

The status of each type of positive termination (diploma recipient, GED recipient, or recipient of both) was examined separately. Figure 4: Percent Non-Recidivists, Recidivists, and Still Incarcerated for Diploma Recipients displays the findings for all students who graduated with a diploma during the years 1976-1986.

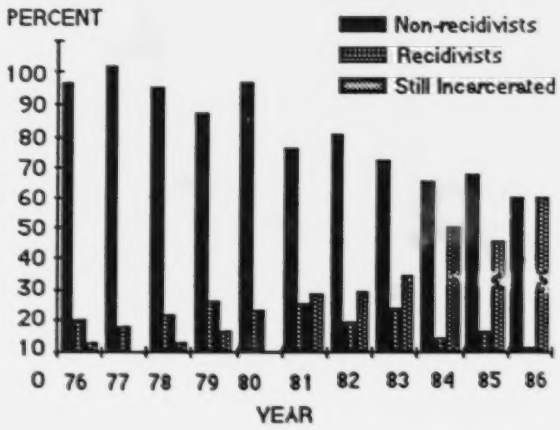
FIGURE 4: PERCENT NON-RECIDIVISTS, RECIDIVISTS, AND STILL INCARCERATED FOR DIPLOMA RECIPIENTS



The recidivism rates for this group ranged from 2.5 to 18.8% and averaged 10.8%. During the last five years of the study, the rate of the still incarcerated has risen sharply to 57.8% and has been accompanied by a decline in both the non-recidivist and recidivist rates. The recidivism rate in the final year of the study, 1986, dropped to 2.9% for this group.

The results of the study for GED recipients are shown on Figure 5: Percent Non-Recidivists, Recidivists, and Still Incarcerated for GED Recipients .

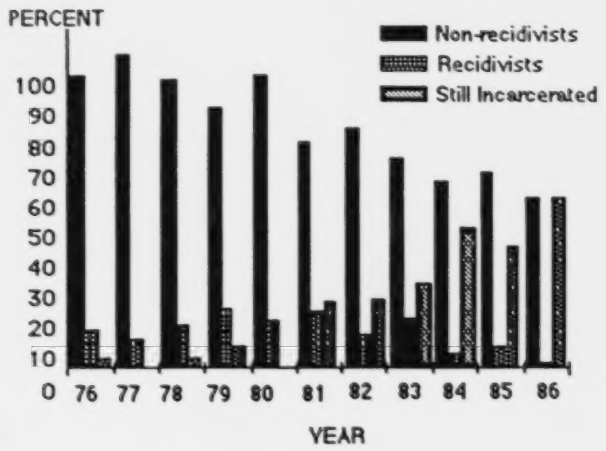
FIGURE 5: PERCENT NON-RECIDIVISTS, RECIDIVISTS, AND STILL INCARCERATED FOR GED RECIPIENTS



The overall trends for this group are similar to those of the preceding one. Starting in 1981, the rate of still incarcerated has steadily increased to 49.6% in 1986 and the rates of recidivism and non-recidivism have consequently declined. The overall recidivism rate is somewhat lower for these students at 10.2% and the trend has been a decreasing recidivism rate. The recidivism rate has ranged from .8 to 4.5% for the last three years in this group.

The results from the final group, those students who received both a GED and a Diploma, are displayed on Figure 6: Percent Non-Recidivists, Recidivists, and Still Incarcerated for Those Who Have Received Both GED's and Diplomas.

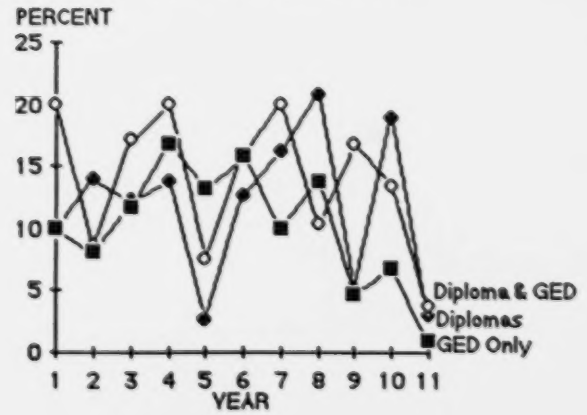
FIGURE 6: PERCENT NON-RECIDIVISTS, RECIDIVISTS, AND STILL INCARCERATED FOR THOSE WHO HAVE RECEIVED BOTH GED'S AND DIPLOMAS



The average recidivism rate for the years of the study for this group is 13.9%. The trend of a sharp increase in the percent of students who reach their educational goals and then return to prison is found in this group as well. In 1981, the rate of still incarcerated jumped to 10.5% and then rose to 63% in the last year of the study

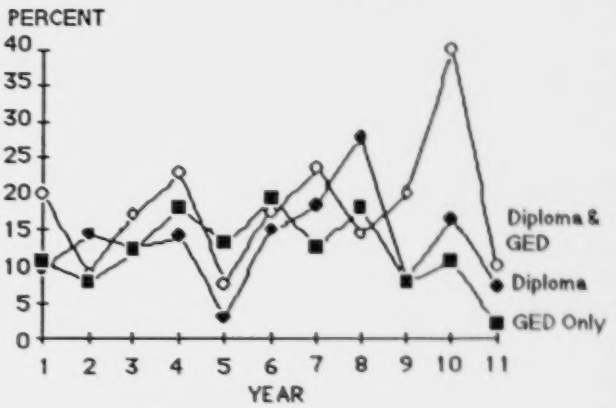
In Figure 7: Comparison of Percent Recidivism for Positive Terminations in the Years 1976-1986, the recidivism rates for each of the three groups studied for each year in the study are displayed. The greatest difference among the three rates in any one year is 12 percentage points in 1985; the least is 6 percentage points in 1977.

FIGURE 7: COMPARISON OF PERCENT RECIDIVISM FOR POSITIVE TERMINATIONS, 1976-1986



Calculations were made to determine the recidivism rate based only on those individuals who were available to recidivate in each of the three groups. This was done by dividing the number of recidivists in a group by the difference between the total number of students in the group and those still incarcerated and multiplying by one hundred. The results are shown on Figures 8 and 9. Figure 8: Comparison of Percent Recidivism for Those Who Were Available to Recidivate by Type of Termination displays the individual rates for each year.

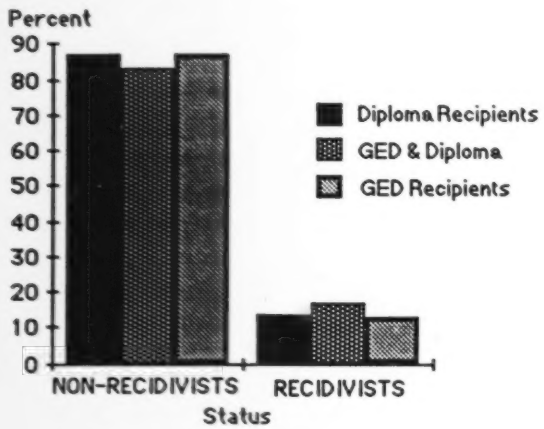
FIGURE 8: COMPARISON OF PERCENT RECIDIVISM FOR THOSE AVAILABLE TO RECIDIVATE BY TYPE OF TERMINATION



The overall pattern of recidivism, as displayed on this figure does not deviate from that on Figure 7, however, as one would expect, the rates are higher when those who were not available to recidivate are eliminated from the population and the variances among the three groups in some years are greater.

For the combined student population, the recidivism rate based only on those individuals who were available to recidivate averaged 13.5%; the non-recidivist rate was 86.5% (See Figure 9: Summary of the Percent Recidivism for Positive Terminations Who Were Available to Recidivate in the Years 1976-1986.). In rank order the recidivism rates, so calculated, are 12.9% for GED recipients, 13.3% for Diploma recipients, and 16.9% for those who earned both a GED and a Diploma.

FIGURE 9: SUMMARY OF THE PERCENT RECIDIVISM FOR POSITIVE TERMINATIONS WHO WERE AVAILABLE TO RECIDIVATE IN THE YEARS 1976-1986



Discussion. The overall recidivism rate and the rates of recidivism for each type of termination across the years of the study support the efficacy of education for incarcerated individuals. Those who attend Ingram State are less likely to recidivate when compared to the general prison population.

It is possible that the low recidivism rates for positively terminated students are associated with special characteristics which exist at Ingram State. The education Ingram State provides to incarcerated individuals differs in several regards from the education provided to prisoners in other areas of the nation. It is fully accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, operates under the Alabama Board of Education, is located outside the confines of the prison system, and maintains security only through the use of perimeter guards. The academic setting and atmosphere is the same as for institutions serving more traditional students. Ingram State is not simply a prison industry.

The data need to be further analyzed in order to investigate the significance of differences in the recidivism rates among GED recipients, Diploma recipients, and those who earned both. Experiential observation of Ingram State's student population provides some insight into the results indicating that the recidivism rates are lower for GED recipients than for Diploma or GED and Diploma recipients. It is the observation of the staff and instructors that, typically, students who stay in school only long enough to earn a GED are younger, initially better educated, tend to have shorter sentences for less serious crimes, and have better social support outside the institution. They are better recidivism risks to begin with. Those students who remain in school through GED and two year diploma training do not have those advantages. They are poorer risks. Obviously, these casual observations need to be empirically investigated.

In addition, considerable light would be shed on the nature of the results with the investigation of factors associated with recidivism and non-recidivism. Factors which might bear fruit in this regard are length of incarceration, type of sentence, type of crime, time remaining to be served, and age at incarceration and at referral to school.

Furthermore, the study would be considerably strengthened with the addition of an appropriate control group. However, it is not possible at this time to set aside a sample of those who have been referred to the college as a control group. The Job Board at the Department of Corrections assigns students to school as a job assignment. In light of the constraints that this arrangement places on student selection and the importance of training these students for productive lives, it is not

probable that an ideal control group will be available.

The growing rate of positively terminated students who return to the prison system needs to be addressed as Ingram State develops long-range plans. This final consideration has recently been addressed and grant funds sought to hire a person designated to meet with the Institutional Job Boards in the correctional facilities that Ingram State serves. This person will facilitate the proper placement of students and monitor their retention and progress. He or she will also serve as an advocate for Ingram State students upon their graduation. More specifically, attention will be directed toward selecting students at an appropriate stage in their incarceration; the development of job sites for graduates; and aiding in coordinating and matching student skills with the Department of Corrections activities in the placement of students in programs such as Supervised Intensive Restitution, Work Release, and Pardons and Paroles. It is anticipated that these activities will increase the efficacy of Ingram State for its students and for the public who support it.

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